

At a meeting of the Dene Valley Parish Council held at the Dene Valley Community Partnership One Stop Shop, High Street, Eldon Lane on **Monday 9 February 2026 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair**

Councillors T Bird, J Clark, R Coleman, T Mitchell, J Moore and R Simm

**Also in attendance:**

Clerk - Ian Croft  
South Durham Community Partnership – Cheryl Hudson

**1. Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence

**2. Public Participation**

There were no Members of the Public in attendance.

**3. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to November being replaced by December in the Minutes approved.

**4. Matters Arising/Chair's Update**

Councillor Simm reported he had met with Peeter Garrod of Durham County Council for a walkabout of Dene Valley Parish Council's area taking in play areas, footpaths, allotments and the former Workingmen's Club. The County Council was keen to improve footpaths and signage and was looking to source funding. While the Parish Council had presented a shopping list of wants and needs it needed to present specifics and perhaps costings.

The Chair replied that the Parish Council needed to know what funding might be available, its source and whether match funding would be needed, because some sources of funding, for example Members budgets, were for capital projects only.

Councillor Simm considered that items such as planters, wildflower meadows and signage were capital items. Councillor Simm suggested that the Parish Council should obtain costings for possible projects and also provide offers of funding to be proactive in any improvements.

Councillor Coleman suggested that sponsorship of planters by local businesses could be explored.

Councillor Simm suggested that the costs of planters should be obtained as well as costings for wildflower meadows. Councillor Simm agreed to obtain costing for planters and Councillor Moore agreed to obtain costings for wildflower meadows.

Councillor Mitchell asked what could be done to protect any wildflower meadows from offroad bikes and quads. The Chair replied that sites would need to be chosen, for example highways verges, which were less likely to be subject to damage.

The Chair informed the meeting that a separate meeting needed to take place to discuss this in more detail and Councillor Simm agreed to arrange such a meeting.

Councillor Mitchell raised the issue of the old Workingmen's Club building which had been boarded up and enquired whether the Parish Council could seek it to be demolished. The Chair replied that the building was on the County Council's watchlist of abandoned commercial properties but she understood the building has asbestos problems. The boarding up was to make the building secure in the short term.

Referring to the former Surestart building the Chair informed the meeting that a letter of interest from the Parish Council had been sent and that there was no need for a Business Plan. Eldon Parish Council would be providing more services from their community centre in partnership with the Cornforth Partnership.

The Chair reported problems with quad bikes gaining access to Blackies Wood which would continue until Eldon Estates dug the ditches they had planned to dig. Four fence panels had been taken out at the GRT site and this was being used as an exit.

The Chair reported loose horses in Gurney Valley and Deanery Court which had been reported to the County Council. There was fly grazing of horses and fences were falling down causing problems of loose horses. The Chair agreed to send details to the Clerk so that Durham County Council could be informed.

The Chair agreed to forward details of her printer cartridge to the Clerk so that a new cartridge could be ordered.

## **5. Participation in current and future projects and Process for providing feedback to emails**

Councillor Simm informed the meeting there was a lot of dialogue between meetings but very little feedback was received. Councillor Bird suggested that given the number of emails Members received on a daily basis then emails should be identified in the subject as being Information or Action Required.

Members agreed that going forwards all emails should be from and to Members .gov.uk email address.

The Chair referred to the previously discussed Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish Council and the necessity for the Parish to have one. Work previously undertaken on a Neighbourhood Plan would need to be updated as the previous work carried out was in 2009 and a lot had changed since then, including housing stock. There would be a need to re-engage with the community.

Councillor Mitchell considered there was a need to identify which Members interested in Neighbourhood Plan work and to start carrying out actions. Councillor Simm suggested as a starting point there was a need to look at the framework in the KICK document and to see if this fitted in with the County Durham Plan. The Chair agreed to organise a framework meeting.

## **6. Finance Update**

The Clerk provided the meeting with details of income and expenditure for the Council to the end of January 2026. The Chair agreed the balances and signed the accounts and bank statements.

The Clerk reported a letter had been received from Durham Hospital Radio seeking a financial contribution from the Council. Members considered this to be a great service to the community and agreed that a donation of £150 be made.

## **7. Police Update**

Councillor Bird circulated an update from the PACT meeting held on 5 February 2026 which contained the following information:

- 7 reports of anti-social behaviour for the area.
- Report of damage to lampposts in the area holding the CCTV cameras Spencer Street and Gibson Street – can confirm the cameras were recovered by Durham County Council when they attended to make the columns safe, currently liaising with DCC and WCCTV (CCTV company) regarding the return of the cameras to see if any footage can be recovered. Lighting columns have been replaced.
- Following previous securing of Close House WMC, access gained, and fire had to attend for an incident – the front shutter has been secured with metal sheeting however rear remains insecure – to be flagged to Environmental Health.
- On Wednesday, officers were involved in a joint operation with Thames Valley Police where a number of stolen agricultural items were recovered in the area and returned.
- 3 vehicles have been recovered from the area in the last month.
- 2x visits to Prince Bishops Primary with Durham Agency Against Crime working with year 5 students discussing local issues, age of criminal responsibility and education on the police service. The children engaged very well.
- In response to concerns raised by bus companies, officers have been on buses running through the area to deter anti-social behaviour/crime.

Issues raised:

- Concern of vehicles to the rear of Wesley St.
- Stray horses discussed with neighbourhood warden.

Priority: remains speeding in the area as due to poor weather conditions, Speedwatch has not been carried out.

## **8. Play areas**

Councillor Coleman informed the meeting that the fencing contractor for the Auckland Park play area was keen to know when the work would be commissioned. The Chair replied that before the fence was replaced there was a need for the owner of the adjacent field to install fencing to prevent the stallion in the field from damaging the park fencing again. She would visit the field owner tomorrow to find out when this fencing would be installed.

## **9. Planning Issues**

Councillor Clerk reported that due to issues with her printer she was unable to circulate a Planning Update. However, she confirmed there were no applications within the Dene Valley Parish area.

## **10. Footpath and Highways Issues**

There were no footpath or highways issues to raise.

## **11. Allotments**

The Clerk reported that a plot on Grange Avenue which was in a state of disrepair was vacant following an email from the current tenant. The meeting agreed this Plot be re-let with new tenants being given two years rent-free.

## **12. Such other Business**

Councillor Mitchell reported she would be sending emails regarding the Big Spring Clean which was taking place between 2 March and 4 May. Members were asked to generate interest in their areas.

Councillor Moore referred to work which had taken place in back streets in Coronation last year and asked whether similar work would take place at the rear of Richard Terrace and David Terrace.

Cheryl Hudsan reported that the next meeting of the South Church Community Partnership would take place next Wednesday at St Andrew's School commencing at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting finished at 8.15 p.m.